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Pattern of conferences

Implementation of recommendations regarding the United Nations Chronicle

Report of the Secretary-General**

I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 7 of its resolution 54/259 of 7 April 2000, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it, at its fifty-fifth session, on the implementation of paragraph 45 of annex II to its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997, by which it decided to amend the programme narrative of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 by replacing, in paragraph 26.39 (*a*) (i) a., "*UN Chronicle* (six issues annually, in English and French)" with "*UN Chronicle* (four issues annually, in all languages)". The present report has been prepared in compliance with that request.

II. Background to the present publication pattern of the United Nations Chronicle

2. The United Nations Chronicle is a public information vehicle of the United Nations, not an official record or document. It is also a sales publication, which helps to generate revenue for the Organization.

3. Until 1986, the United Nations Chronicle was published 11 times a year in all six languages of the Organization. Owing to the financial situation faced by the United Nations in 1986, a decision was taken in April of that year to reduce the periodicity of the publication to once every three months. In view of the fact that in-house staff resources for translation are primarily made available for official documentation, the Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish editions were

* A/56/150.

** The present report has been submitted late due to continuing discussions on publishing arrangements.

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translated externally. Typesetting, layout and printing of the Arabic, Chinese and Russian editions also needed to be completed externally.

4. In 1996, the financial crisis with which the United Nations was confronted compelled the Department of Public Information to review a number of activities and, in some cases, reduce their scope. It was within the context of these unavoidable cost-cutting measures that the Department decided to suspend the Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish editions of the United Nations Chronicle. At that time, while the Chinese and Russian editions had print runs of 5,000 and 2,000 copies, respectively, those in Arabic and Spanish aggregated only 700 and 900 copies, respectively. The Department considered it would be prudent to resume these editions at a time when resources were available to ensure timely publication of a quality product that could secure sustained reader loyalty in each of these language regions. This would enlarge the publication's reach, hitherto not optimally extended, and enable the United Nations Chronicle to develop its potential for an expanded subscriber base.

5. It was also evident that even the normal lapse of three months between individual quarterly issues of the publication, in any language, was a deterrent to cultivating for the publication a truly global audience and increasing its subscriber base. To address this situation, the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 recommended publishing the United Nations Chronicle in English and French six times a year instead of four. This reflected the Department's belief that issuing the United Nations Chronicle more frequently could enhance its appeal and secure a viable editorial and sales basis, from which it would proceed to resume publication in all the official languages of the Organization. However, the General Assembly, in paragraph 45 of annex II to its resolution 52/220, decided that the United Nations Chronicle should be produced four times a year in all the official languages.

III. Measures undertaken by the Department of Public Information in response to General Assembly resolution 52/220

6. Following the adoption of resolution 52/220, the Department of Public Information began to explore several options to resume publication of editions of the United Nations Chronicle in Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish. The Department undertook to produce a pilot edition in each of the four languages in order to assess comprehensively the costs and feasibility of resuming regular production of those language editions, to the extent possible within the approved budget. However, experience in the Department's efforts to produce the pilot edition suggested that a lengthy period of time was required to carry out, through the external contractor identified, the work relating to the typesetting, proof-reading and layout of the edition and that consequently the edition would lose its value. As such, the project would no longer be pursued.

7. The experience of the pilot project reflected the necessity to base the production of these editions of the United Nations Chronicle upon a secure financial basis that would be adequate to the task of ensuring the greatest possible parity in quality and timeliness between all editions. Bearing in mind the difficulties experienced by the Department in producing the publication in the manner and

frequency requested by the General Assembly, resource requirements in the amount of $1.3 million have been included in the proposed programme budget of the Department of Public Information for the biennium 2002-2003 for the purpose of producing the United Nations Chronicle four times a year in all six official languages. This sum would enable the Department to contract for the translation, typesetting, layout, proof-reading and printing of the journal.

IV. Observations

8. As the Organization's flagship publication, the United Nations Chronicle has emerged as an authoritative and compelling global forum for ideas, debate and opinion about the United Nations system and the many issues of concern and relevance to the international community. The publication continues to attract contributors of stature and eminence, including heads of State and Government, United Nations and other officials, leaders in civil society, scholars and artists. In this context, the desire of the General Assembly to see the United Nations Chronicle appear in six languages is fully understood. The Department will endeavour to see how this can be done as efficiently and effectively as possible so that the expectations of Member States can be fulfilled.

Annex

Periodicity and languages of the United Nations Chronicle: 1986 to present

Year	*Periodicity*	*Languages*
1986	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1987	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1988	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1989	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1990	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1991	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1992	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1993	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1994	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1995	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S
1996	Quarterly	E/F
1997	Quarterly	E/F
1998	Quarterly	E/F
1999	Quarterly	E/F
2000	Quarterly	E/F
2001	Quarterly	A/C/E/F/R/S*

* The Department has been exploring, as an alternative option for 2001-2002, co-publication arrangements through commercial or other publishers for the external production of the journal in Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish. Co-publishers would be required to ensure that the format, design and content of all editions of the United Nations Chronicle are commensurate with each other and the English original in terms of quality and intended reader appeal; contractual agreements would provide co-publishers the opportunity to market the United Nations Chronicle commercially, thus enhancing the publication's global outreach. Preliminary discussions with different publishers indicate that the Organization would be required to subsidize the production costs; and given the tentative stage of these discussions, co-publication is not likely to begin before issue 4 of 2001. Should the co-publication arrangement not prove workable in any of the four languages, the alternative of publication by the Organization of editions translated and produced by external vendors would be pursued.